

Working Together to Develop our Fostering Service for York's Children and Young People

A briefing for Foster Carers and Social Care Staff

1. Introduction

York foster carers provide safe, warm and welcoming care to some of the City's most vulnerable children and young people.

When we ask our Looked after Children about the care they receive most tell us they are *happy in their placement*¹

In York, our foster carers work together to help each other and the children and young people they look after. Stay-overs, peer support, informal coffee mornings and more formal meetings with Council officers all contribute to a great fostering service.

Feedback we received through the Make York Home consultations tells us that our foster carers and social care staff are very ambitious to make sure that in the future, few or no children will need to go outside of our City² for their care. Of course this is good news and we want to respond.

2. Make York Home

At the heart of the Make York Home work is an aspiration to ensure that we have enough, well supported and fully engaged foster carers working with social care colleagues to ensure that there is a placement that is right for every child who needs one and that this is in or near to York.

The City is very fortunate to have a high number of very experienced carers who have the knowledge and skills to help

¹ U Matter Survey 2017 – 94% of children surveyed said they were happy with their placement.

² In this, case we include all York carers whether or not they live within the City boundaries

develop and grow our fostering community. Our very experienced foster carers are a valuable resource and a great source of advice, support and guidance both for newer carers and for the Local Authority in terms of helping to shape the future foster carer arrangements for the City.

3. The Challenge

In a nutshell, the biggest challenge in achieving our Make York Home vision is the supply of new foster carers coming into the system.

We know that many potential fostering households rule themselves out, on first reflection, often believing they are not suitable and sometimes for financial reasons.

When we talk to people who decide not to apply to become a foster carer they tell us that the current remuneration structure makes it very difficult for them to make the necessary lifestyle changes to commit to this role.

This situation is not unique to York and indeed there is currently a national fostering stock take to³ look nationally at the role of foster care, an exercise driven in part by recognition of a national shortage of fostering households.

We know that many of our very experienced carers will retire over the coming years and it is really important that we do not lose their experience, skill and knowledge as they leave us. Thankfully some choose to work with us in different ways beyond their caring role to offer advice and sometimes direct support to new carers. This is definitely a pattern we would like to sustain.

4. Growing our Foster Carer Community

It is also essential that we think carefully about how we can address the concerns and barriers to those families described above so they can join our fostering workforce. To do this we will

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-fostering-stocktake-call-for-evidence>

need to make some changes to our current arrangements. This might include:

- a review of our approach to advertising and recruiting carers
- building and growing the support arrangements that our foster carers tell us work well (stay-overs, advanced training and gateway events)
- experimenting with new arrangements (peer mentoring, fostering clusters)
- thinking again about how we can remunerate our foster carers from the start so they are in a position to apply themselves to the role full time where that is needed

5. Our Approach to Change

For all of the reasons described above we will approach any change as a shared endeavour. Working with York Area Foster Carer Association [YAFCA], our fostering households, our looked after children and young people and Council officers and elected members we will shape and design our arrangements to make sure that we can deliver our Make York Home vision.

6. Pace of Change

Everyone involved in our fostering arrangements in York will understand that time is not on our side in terms of making the necessary changes to make it possible for more families to foster. This does not mean we will rush any changes but we will draw on the extensive discussions and conversations we have had to date to inform some initial design principles.

7. Thinking about the 'As Is'

We recognise the importance of minimising where possible any disruption or changes where working well, however even at this early stage it is inevitable that any change will bring some disruption and in these circumstances we are determined to consult widely and to listen carefully at each stage.

8. Scope of Review

The review of our fostering arrangements will focus in the first stage on issues that may prevent families from considering this role. Specifically, we will look at:

- our approaches to advertising and recruitment
- our financial remuneration structure⁴
- our support to fostering households
- the development pathways for our foster carers
- how we recognise long service and celebrate properly the contribution of those fostering households that retire or resign.

9 Timeline for the project

Phase 1 –August 2017

Information gathering: focus groups / meetings with relevant staff including foster carers, fostering staff, the finance team and young people.

Research neighbouring authorities including North Yorkshire, East Riding, Hull, North Lincs and North East Lincs to obtain details of their current payment systems to ensure any changes that CYC proposes are comparable.

Phase 2 – September 2017

Initial proposal paper to be drawn up.

⁴ The introduction of any new fee payment system will retain an element of choice and opportunity for each fostering household.

Phase 3 - October/November 2017

Consultation period with foster carers – minimum 28 days.

Phase 4 – November / December 2017

Re-draft proposal to include suggestions/comments from the consultation.

Phase 5 – January 2018

Proposal to be presented to CYC Executive Member.

Phase 6 - April 2018

Implementation of the new system.

Draft for